

New Soviet Threat 'Disturbing' to Bush

By ANDREW ROSENTHAL

Special to The New York Times

HAMILTON, Bermuda, April 13 — Speaking with unusual force about the Lithuanian crisis, President Bush said today that he and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain found reports of a Kremlin ultimatum to the Baltic republic "deeply disturbing." Mr. Bush said imposition of economic sanctions against Lithuania would violate Moscow's stated policy of seeking to resolve the stalemate over Lithuania's desire for independence without force.

"Now is no time for escalation; it's time for talks," Mr. Bush said, speaking for himself and for Mrs. Thatcher at a news conference here.

Mrs. Thatcher added: "We've come a long way in relations between the Soviet Union and the free world. We wish that improvement to continue, but it could not continue if the Soviet Union were to resolve this by force."

Neither the President nor Mrs. Thatcher would say what they would or could do if President Mikhail S. Gorbachev carried out a threat to suspend shipments of vital supplies, possibly including oil and natural gas, to Lithuania if certain laws are not rescinded in two days. The two leaders also tried to couch their remarks as diplomatically as possible.

Still, their statements after talks represented a marked change by Mr. Bush, who has carefully avoided commenting on developments in the Soviet Union in recent weeks. Mrs. Thatcher has also been restrained in her public statements about Lithuania, restricting herself to calls for peaceful dialogue that she and Mr. Bush repeated today.

On Forgiving the Germans

Special to The New York Times

HAMILTON, Bermuda, April 13 — Invoking the spirit of Good Friday and Easter, President Bush said today that people "ought to forgive" Germans for the Holocaust but should not forget history's lessons.

"I'm one who believes in forgiveness," Mr. Bush said aboard Air Force One en route to a meeting with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain. "And this is a good day for forgiveness for those with faith."

On Thursday the newly formed East German Government formally recognized Germany's responsibility for the systematic genocide carried out by the Nazis in World War II, including the

deaths of six million Jews and untold numbers of Gypsies and others, and asked for forgiveness.

"Should we forgive them?" a reporter asked Mr. Bush today.

"Most of the teachings have ample room for forgiveness and moving on," he said, adding that people should "not forget, necessarily, because I think you learn from history, learn what not to do wrong."

"But," he said, "I think, I'm a Christian and I think forgiveness is something that I feel very strongly about." Mr. Bush added that he was making "a personal observation."

"That's not a statement for our country," he said.

The two leaders said they were basing their remarks on a news report about Mr. Gorbachev's threat and declined to go into much detail on the development.

Mr. Bush said the two had learned of the ultimatum only moments before their news conference began and added that their Governments had not yet independently confirmed the details. But United States officials said the White House had in fact learned of it 90 minutes earlier and that Mr. Bush and Mrs. Thatcher had been handed the dispatch about 30 minutes before they emerged from their private conversations to take questions.

The fact that the intensely cautious

Mr. Bush, acting for himself and Mrs. Thatcher, chose to bring up the news report at the outset of the news conference, before they were asked about it, illuminated the alarm with which the two leaders viewed the Kremlin's ultimatum more than their words did.

On Germany and NATO

Mr. Bush and Mrs. Thatcher said the Lithuanian question, as well as broader issues of German unification and reorganization of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, occupied much of their four hours of talks at the cream-colored stucco colonial palace that is Hamilton's Government House.

Since the news report from Moscow was given to the two leaders toward the end of the talks, it was not clear how much time they could have devoted to discussing Mr. Gorbachev's demand that Lithuania rescind a series of laws its Parliament has passed since the declaration of independence.

"Obviously, there has been no time to look into this matter in detail or determine all the facts," Mr. Bush said. "But we have been calling on Moscow publicly and privately for avoiding escalatory measures in favor of dialogue."

Mrs. Thatcher said that she and Mr. Bush had agreed in advance on what he would say about Mr. Gorbachev's threat.

Reluctant at First

At first, Mr. Bush was reluctant to characterize the ultimatum or say whether it violated Mr. Gorbachev's promises not to use force to keep Lithuania within the Soviet Union. But he later said: "Am I concerned about the report? If it proves to be accurate, the answer is yes, because it goes against the policy of dialogue and a no-coercion dialogue that will result in peaceful evolution of democracy and self-determination."

"So I'm concerned about the report. I'm concerned about the timing. But I just don't want to comment any further."

Mrs. Thatcher bristled when asked about reports that Mr. Gorbachev had told a delegation of United States senators in Moscow this week that he did not want "lectures" from the West on how to handle Lithuania.

"We're just not lecturing anyone, but we're entitled to express a view," she said.

The Prime Minister added: "We've frequently expressed it. This is not a problem that should be solved by force and which cannot be solved by force. It therefore must be solved by discussion. We had a duty to say what we think. We still think that way and we still think that is the only way to go."

Mr. Bush has said the use of force in Lithuania would set back Soviet-American relations at a time when arms control and other issues appearing to be moving forward relatively smoothly. A major dispute in the relationship could also jeopardize the summit meeting planned in the United States for May 30 to June 3.